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University of Montana

NEWS RELEASE

Office of News and Publications
Missoula, MT 59812
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March 13, 1991

UM RESEARCHER: MONTANA'S LUMBER PRODUCTION HITS FIVE-YEAR LOW

MISSOULA --

Poor markets in the fourth quarter of 1990 contributed to Montana's lumber production falling to a five-year low, The University of Montana Bureau of Business and Economic Research reports.

In cooperation with the Montana Wood Products Association, the bureau compiled the quarterly figures of 29 plants that produce more than 90 percent of the state's wood and paper products.

Charles Keegan, director of forest industry research for the bureau, says poor wood products markets due to a national recession combined with timber shortages and very cold weather in December 1990 to curtail production at 20 of the 29 mills surveyed.

Montana's estimated lumber production for 1990 is 1,454 million board feet, down from 1,570 million board feet in 1989, Keegan says.

"The 1990 level is the lowest production by Montana's industry since 1985, when production was 1,445 million board feet," he says.

Lumber production in the fourth quarter of 1990 was 392 million board feet, he says, down from 393 million board feet in the fourth quarter of 1989.

Plywood production was also down from 1989 levels, Keegan says. Montana's plywood mills produced 718 million square feet in 1990,

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down from 725 million square feet produced in 1989.

Production employment in Montana's forest products industry declined from an average 4,581 workers in 1989 to an average of 4,369 in 1990, he says. Employment in the fourth quarter of 1990 was 4,262 workers, down 394 workers from the same period in 1989.

Production workers' wages decreased from \$126.2 million in 1989 to \$124.1 million in 1990, he says.

The recession is expected to have a much greater impact on the industry in 1991, with further curtailments and several plant closures, Keegan says. The bureau estimates that production employment in February of 1991 was fewer than 3,500 workers, compared to 4,398 workers in February of 1990. The decrease is due to the closures of several large sawmills and two plywood plants in the first six weeks of 1991, he says.

The employment figures refer only to production workers at sawmills, plywood plants, pulp and paper mills, particleboard and fiberboard plants and utility pole plants. These production workers account for about half the wage and salary workers in Montana's forest products industry. Estimates do not include the several thousand workers in logging, trucking and other related jobs affected by the recession.

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